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Amid the Sound and the Fury

OMB Says It Will Delay Ceiling On Research Overhead Rates

Academe's Washington-based lobbyists have gone bananas in unison—a sure sign that the Administration is seriously seeking a remedy for the grubby scandal of overhead charges that universities collect on federally supported research grants.

Shrill and intended to create alarm, the lobbyists' protests have been effective. Implementation of a cap on reimbursement of administrative overhead costs has been postponed—possibly even killed—following dour prophecies of scientific decline, collapse of the educational structure, and irreversible Japanese hegemony.

As now and then comes out in candid acknowledgements from experienced university research administrators, the real truth about overhead costs is that, while they unquestionably are generated by campus-based research programs, they have been greatly exploited. Overhead rates are never computed the same way in any 2 places. (For Harvard Medical School, it's 99 percent, while for the University of Kansas Medical Center, it's 40 percent). Overhead expenditures have risen sharply

Congressional Pork-Barrelers Reported Eyeing Project Funds—Page 6

and are depleting money for research as crafty university managers have come to regard overhead the way Willie Sutton regarded banks.

Joseph R. Wright Jr., Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget, told a Congressional hearing on March 26 that overhead's take rose from 24 percent of federal payments for academic research in 1974 to 31 percent in 1984. (Money for overhead costs are not separately appropriated; rather, the funds that end up in overhead payments are contained in budgets that are labeled for support of research.) The growth in overhead costs, Wright testified, "represents an annual shift of over $400 million from research to university overhead. And each year, the problem gets worse," he continued, "as overhead rates rise and research dollars shrink. We estimate that the overhead rates are increasing about one-half percentage point per year. In 1986, the $400 million will have grown to over $450 million," Wright warned.

Wright was referring to growth in overhead reim-

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As Ad Revenues Plummet

Scientific American up for Sale; AAAS' Science86 Gushing Red Ink

Science periodicals for the general public, pop as well as serious, have hit heavy economic weather, and the results are showing up in a number of major developments that have been announced or that are on the way.

The most concrete of these was the announcement last month that *Scientific American* is up for sale following a long-running decline in ad revenues and a revolt by stockholders. Meanwhile, *Science86,* published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, has also experienced a steep ad decline and is reported to be losing $1 million a year. An AAAS source tells SGR that "there's been no decision to sell the magazine, but we're not ruling it out."

Scientific American's sales decision was revealed by

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In Brief

Department of Energy officials have returned with optimistic reports from Geneva, where they met with Soviet counterparts as a follow-up to the Reagan-Gorbachev summit statement calling for collaboration on fusion research. The Russians, they say, were congenial and cooperative. But what happens next is far from clear. With the US fusion program in sharp financial decline, fusion researchers find the main demand for their skills is concentrated in the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI) is engaged in a campaign of quiet persuasion on Capitol Hill to promote federal funds for paranormal research. Pell has added a longtime advocate of such research to his personal staff. Last year, Pell organized a conference on "Does Consciousness Survive Physical Death?" On several occasions, he has met with NSF officials to urge their sympathetic attention to applications for "psi" research funds. In response, they assure him that the peer-review process can handle anything.

Gramm-Rudman is taking its toll on Capitol Hill, which, along with all other civilian federal activities, must absorb a 4.3-percent reduction in expenditures originally authorized for this year. One effect: the publications budget of the House Science and Technology Committee has been cut back, delaying a gusher of reports and hearing texts from its long-running Task Force on Science Policy.

Academy of Sciences Signs Agreement with Soviets

After handwringing over the persecution of Andrei Sakharov and posturing around the issue of human rights and Soviet manipulation of exchange programs, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) has joined its Soviet counterpart in an exchange agreement that pays little effective attention to any of these sore problems.

The NAS's step toward a fullscale resumption of inter-Academy relations reflects the view that brutes though the Soviets may be, it's important to be in communication with them—especially in the anti-Soviet atmosphere that pervades the Reagan Administration. The Academy houses deep divisions on this choice. NAS President Frank Press, a longtime supporter of arms control, has dominated the issue with the argument that while pushing for human rights and equitable exchanges, it's time for the Academy to lessen the chill in its relations with the Soviets.

The agreement, which has been in an off-and-on state since a preliminary inter-Academy statement was drafted in January 1985 (SGR Vol. XV, No. 2), nods toward human rights by linking its provisions to the "principles and conditions" of the Helsinki Accords of 1975—which the Soviets routinely ignore. While the inter-Academy agreement was under discussion, Sakharov's wife was granted an exit visa to receive medical treatment in the West, and Anatol Scharansky was released from prison and permitted to leave the Soviet Union. Perhaps these were intended as conciliatory signs by the Soviets, but Academy sources tell SGR that the no *quid pro quo* on Sakharov's behalf or other issues of human rights was granted by the Soviets.

The Sakharov issue obviously remains a troublesome one within the politics of the US National Academy. On April 9, just 4 days after announcing its new deal with the Soviets, the NAS announced that it was sending a message to the Soviet Academy calling for "a substantial amelioration of the situation of Academician Andrei Sakharov." Addressed to the President of the Soviet Academy, A. P. Aleksandrov, the NAS message was signed by Frank Press, who introduced the communication by writing that "Members of the National Academy of Sciences have requested that the following message be sent to colleagues in the Academy of Sciences of the USSR."

An NAS press release accompanying the text of Press' message listed various steps that the Academy had previously taken in behalf of Sakharov and his wife, Elaine Bonner.

The inter-Academy agreement expresses little more than high hopes on the sensitive issue of the Soviets traditionally keeping virtually all of their scientific superstars off the exchange circuit. In regard to a provision for exchanges of up to 6 "Academy Scholars" for 2-4 week visits each year, the agreement merely says that "Each Academy will insofar as possible support the invitations of the other Academy"; in regard to annual workshops "on subjects jointly selected by the Academy officers," it says that joint "expert groups" will "identify scientists appropriate for each workshop." In reference to a provision for individual invited visits, the text states, "It is desirable that such visits become an important and significant part of the total individual exchanges."

The extended negotiations that led to the agreement were accompanied by strong protests from Academy members who felt that the Soviets' obvious eagerness for renewing ties should be exploited in behalf of human rights. Last May, in a letter to *Science,* this position was strongly stated by 3 Nobel laureate NAS members: Christian Anfinsen, of Johns Hopkins University; Paul J. Flory, Stanford, and Arno Z. Penzias, Bell Laboratories.

Referring to the reduction in inter-Academy ties that the NAS unilaterally undertook following the invasions of Poland and Afghanistan and the banishment and harsh treatment of Sakharov and his wife, the 3 NAS members assailed the exchange negotiations with the Soviets and asked, "What . . . has changed in the past 5 years to explain the about-face from the moral stance of 1980?"

The answer, of course, is that nothing much—except that it's more apparant than ever that the Soviets don't yield to the cold shoulder, despite their persistent interest in getting inside American laboratories.

The new agreement will run for 2 years. It contains provisions for officers of the academies to meet at least once a year, and for termination of fruitless programs.

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. . . Overhead Money Used for Graduation Ceremony

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bursements. In terms of its share of federal support for academic research, the overhead portion in 1984 amounted to $1.7 billion, compared to $3.7 billion for the direct support of research.

Touching on the chimerical basis of some overhead charges that have been tied to scientific research projects, Wright reported that "at one institution, the federal overhead payment is supporting the costs of the university's Liberal Arts Self-Study Committee. While perhaps allowable under the current rules," he conceded, "it is not clear that this Committee benefits federally sponsored research. At many other institutions," he went on, "the federal payment for administrative overhead includes a portion of the commencement exercise costs . . . . To put this into perspective, the National Institutes of Health spends as much on university overhead as it does on cancer research."

The Administration's remedy, published in the February 12 *Federal Register,* was the latest in a succession of futile efforts to crimp the growth in overhead charges. It sought to do so by capping administrative overhead costs at 26 percent of direct costs this year and 20 percent next year.

Administrative costs comprise departmental administration, general administration, administration of sponsored projects, and administration of student services. These costs currently amount to about 60 percent of the total bundle of indirect costs. The rest come under the heading of "infrastructure"—which also varies from place to place and would be unaffected by the proposed change. By imposing the cap, OMB reported, $100 million in research agency funds would be freed for actual research activities this year and $200 million next year.

OMB's original timetable allowed 30 days for comment and an April 1 startup for the cap on reimbursement. But the counterattack, though expected, proved

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Once in a While, Candor Shines Through on the Overhead Issue

Frank talk on the issue of reimbursement of overhead costs for government-supported research is a rarity in Washington, but now and then it occurs.

In 1983, while still relatively new on the Washington scene, NIH Director James B. Wyngaarden publicly noted that the "inexorable rise of the total fraction of the research budget represented by indirect costs has occurred irrespective of the rate of change of the [NIH] research budget. In virtually every one of the last 16 years, the indirect-cost rate has grown faster than the direct-cost rate," he pointed out. The implication clearly was that it can't on like this.

Wyngaarden proposed for discussion several formulas for reducing the diversion of NIH funds from research to overhead payments: A 10-percent across-the-board reduction, redefinition of allowable indirect costs, a standard fixed allowance, a fixed allowance linked to an institution's history of indirect costs, and a choice of a fixed or negotiated rate (SGR Vol. XIII, No. 6). The research universities didn't like any of them, and successfully lobbied to thwart the Administration's effort to impose a 10-percent cut on overhead payments in the fiscal 1983 appropriation for NIH. Wyngaarden pursued the issue of indirect costs for a time, but then dropped it.

At the March 26 hearing that a House Science and Technology Subcommittee held on the Administration's latest plan to hold down overhead payments, Don Fuqua (D-Fla.), Chairman of the full Committee, injected a note of skepticism about the standard university position on the issue. A staunch champion of generous federal support for universities, Fuqua nonetheless said that "all of us need to reexamine some of the assumptions that have evolved.

"For example," he said, "universities want to do research, and they expect their faculty members to do research. Thus, it is not obvious that the federal government should have the obligation to pay for all the possible indirect costs of research projects as if the government were the only beneficiary of research.

"Certainly there is a need," Fuqua continued, "to take out the incentives for escalating costs whereby the more expensive a university is to operate, the more money it can get in indirect costs. Also, I believe that there needs to be more uniformity in the overhead rates so that they are less dependent on the quality and number of lawyers and accountants and also less dependent on the location of the university. At any rate, the indirect-cost calculation method should be open and simple. It should perhaps be uniform within categories, and possibly be itself subject to peer review.

"On the other hand," he concluded, "it must recognize that indirect costs are real, and universities need and deserve support."

The note of skepticism in Fuqua's observations about overhead may have something to do with the fact that state universities generally claim far lower rates than private institutions—and Florida State University is in his district. Of likely significance, too, is that Fuqua is retiring from Congress at the end of this session and therefore may be more willing to sound off on touchy issues.

. . . Universities Warn of Loss of $300 Million

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too much, even for the formidable OMB. On March 20, the day a House Science and Technology Subcommittee heard OMB's Wright and other witnesses, a page-one headline in the *New York Times* proclaimed, "Administration Backing Cuts for Research at Universities." The accompanying article began with "The Reagan Administration plans to cut federally financed research at colleges and universities by hundreds of millions of dollars in the next few years . . . "—which some might consider a topsy-turvy rendition of what the curb on overpayments was intended to accomplish.

Threading its way through the complexities of the overhead issue, the article properly reflected, in paragraph 16, that scientists at the bench have their own views about the front office ripping off research money. It quoted a Congressional staff member as saying, "The researchers are in the middle. A lot of them feel that too much of the federal research budget is going to administrative costs, that overhead soaks up too much money."

But high above that relevant observation, prime space was accorded the dour prophecies of the mandarins of One DuPont Circle, higher education's Washington bunker.

"The overall loss in revenues will be $300 million for just one year," said Milton Goldberg, Executive Director of the Council on Government Relations. "This will do very significant damage to universities," said Robert M. Rosenzweig, President of the Association of American Universities.

After OMB's Wright testified at the House hearing, a string of witnesses assailed the proposed limitations on overhead reimbursement. Common among them was the theme that OMB announced the proposed change on short notice and without consulting the universities. This is a strange proposition, given that OMB and academe have been battling on overhead rates for 25 years and that the universities have repeatedly stonewalled all efforts to reduce the levels of reimbursement.

The latest attempt to hold down overhead reimbursements appears to be on the way to the fate of its many predecessors. Wright, confronted by academe's cries of outrage, said OMB would delay implementation of the cap until July 1. Meanwhile, as in the past, steps are being taken in Congress to block the limits through legislation or at least by banning it through the language of appropriations reports.

The real issue of university overhead remains unaddressed: All universities, whether well-managed or ill-managed, are ravenous for money. Unexploited sources are few or non-existent. Meanwhile, Washington extols the value of university-based research while cutting back on all academic fields outside of research. The result is that academic budget managers are inexorably drawn to getting it where they can. The biggest bundle, whether paid out for direct or indirect costs, is earmarked "research."

The madcap and often-squalid pursuit of overhead reimbursement follows naturally from the skaky economics of higher education. The current economic season isn't a promising one for seriously examining better ways of maintaining the financial health of universities and their scientific components. But after the Gramm-Rudman fever subsides, it would be useful to start seriously talking about block grants, on the style of Britain's University Grants Committee, to shore up university finances.—DSG

R&D Forecast at $116 Billion

Research and development spending in the US will total $116.8 billion this year, a real increase of 4.4 percent over 1985, according to the latest forecast from Battelle, the big consulting and research firm, which regularly tracks the numbers.

Funds provided by industry will total $58.2 billion, while the federal government will provide $54.5 billion, the forecast says. Close to $4 billion is expected to come from academic and other non-profit organizations.

Industry remains the biggest participant in R&D, both as a source of funds and performer. In 1986, it will conduct 73 percent of all the R&D in the US, at a total cost of $85 billion.

ASME to Translate Soviet R&D

The American Society of Mechanical Engineers says it has encouraging results from an effort to assess its members' interest in translations of current Soviet engineering literature (SGR Vol. XV, No. 11). As a result, plans are underway to translate 5 books, and others may follow.

The expressions of interest in Soviet engineering literature are hardly a measure of the state of Soviet engineering, but they're noteworthy in view of the US hardline view that the Soviets have little or nothing of interest to offer in exchange programs.

Members were invited to indicate interest in some 200 books briefly described in 8 recent issues of *Mechanical Engineering*, monthly publication of the ASME, which has a circulation of 110,000. About 100 personally written and addressed responses per issue were received. ASME says that's a good return, given that individual items on its pre-addressed advertisers' cards usually draw about 50 responses.

. . . Scientific American Lost 570 Ad Pages in 4 Years

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the magazine's Chairman, Gerald Piel, who bought the publication with 2 partners shortly after World War II and turned it into a prestigious and highly profitable operation that expanded into foreign editions and book publishing. The Piel family and associates—his son, Jonathan, succeeded to the editorship 3 years ago—own one-third of the company's stock. Employes and independent shareholders control another one-third.

The balance is held by Arthur Sackler, 72, a philanthropist who made a fortune from *Medical Tribune*, various other medical and scientific publications, plus an advertising agency. Sackler came in as a financial angel several years ago to help *Scientific American* in its early stages of decline, but is now said to be disenchanted with the management and has maneuvered himself into a position where he's got the votes to force changes. One of those mentioned is that he might want to take it over himself.

According to the scorekeeping *Media Industry Newsletter*, the number of advertising pages in *Scientific American* declined from 1134 in 1981 to 565 last year—and the decline has continued into this year. From $17 million in 1984, ad revenues dropped to $14 millon last year, and they're continuing downward.

Scientific American doesn't have its circulation audited by the industry's standard monitor, but it's reported to have been stuck around 500,000 for the past few years.

Piel announced that Salomon Brothers is handling the sale of the magazine. With 225,000 shares outstanding, a sales price of around $30 million is being talked about in publishing circles. Several possible buyers have been mentioned, including Time Inc., publisher of the monthly *Discover*, another science magazine that has experienced advertising anemia. The parent company of the British weekly *Economist* is also said to be interested, as is Hearst, publisher of *Science Digest*, which has also suffered advertising declines.

While Time Inc. and Hearst have the resources to carry weak economic performers, the AAAS doesn't. SGR's source there says that the magazine is "taking a terrible beating on advertising." According to *Media Industry Newsletter*, the AAAS magazine, which is published 10 times a year, carried 414 pages of ads in 1983; the total dropped to 384 in 1984 and 308 last year. The figures for this year are down 27 percent from the same period in 1985.

The AAAS is proud of the magazine, which got off to a healthy start as *Science80*, quickly attracted a hefty audience that's hovered around the 700,000 mark, and won a number of important prizes. But the economic reality of the situation is that the AAAS is in poor condition to carry a financial loser, no matter how much it contributes to the Association's charter goal of improving the "public understanding of science."

The AAAS membership, now 135,000, has shown little change in recent years. The annual AAAS meetings, which once drew large and involved audiences, have become ghostlike proceedings. The 1985 meeting drew about 2000 registrants to Los Angeles. In contrast, the American Chemical Society, which has a similar number of members, drew 15,000 last year at its annual meeting, in Chicago.

With considerable trepidation, the AAAS' annual membership dues were raised by $5, to $65 this year. AAAS strategists are nervous about the effect of the increase, and doubt that another can follow soon without adverse effects on membership.

With the weekly *Science* turning a profit of about $3 million a year, the AAAS has some flexibility, and can absorb the $1 million a year loss that's ascribed to the *Science86* operation. But, as one AAAS official said to SGR, "There are a lot of other things we could be doing with that money."

The great mystery of the plight of all the aforementioned scientific magazines is that they are popular with their readers and, by successful magazine publishing standards, they have plenty of them—numerically, that is. The difficulty is that the science magazines are disdained by the powers on Madison Avenue that make the placement decisions for their clients' ads.

In the jargon of Madison Ave., the science magazines lack the right "demographics," which means that there are presumably cheaper ways of getting at the readers that advertisers want to reach. The science magazines are also said to be short on "pass-along," the term for how many readers take hold of a specific copy. The ad people say such matters are reliably ascertained through surveys. The publishers and editors of the science magazines consider the concept voodoo nonsense.

Scientific American tried to break out of the advertising straitjacket several years ago by describing itself as a great medium for reaching affluent businessmen. It fared poorly in gaining the "upscale" ads that it sought, while the attempted turnaround chilled some of its old advertisers.

While the red ink gushes, publishing circles resound with all kinds of possible plays on the science scene, involving all manner of combinations of existing publications. But as one veteran of magazine publishing sees it, no good can come for any of the magazines from the demise or amalgamation of any of them. If one of them disappears, he said, that simply signals the advertisers that the medium isn't viable.

California University Chiefs Assail Pork-Barrel R&D

It's still too early in this year's legislative session for the coming crop of academic pork-barrel ventures to sprout on Capitol Hill. But with the last Congress having racked up what looks like an all-time record of appropriations earmarked for buildings at specific universities (SGR Vol. XVI, No. 1), pleas for restraint are already being sounded. Repeating past patterns, they come from the Presidents of institutions that have fared well under the old order.

Teaming up as defenders of what they laud as the "competitive process of merit review" for dishing out federal money are David P. Gardner, University of California; Donald Kennedy, Stanford; Marvin L. Goldberger, Caltech, and James Zumberge, USC.

In what the Stanford News Service describes as "an unusual joint letter to the California Congressionl delegation," the 4 Presidents noted a lack of federal programs for construction and renovation of university laboratory facilities. "Consequently," they stated, "some institutions have appealed directly to Congress for badly needed funds. These requests for special earmarked appropriations, while understandable, undermine the merit review process and by extension, the long-term health of our academic research efforts . . . . "

Pointing out that "Government agencies have evolved somewhat different mechanisms of peer review and evaluation, depending on their individual traditions and missions," the letter added, "We do not believe any particular system has any unique claim to excellence; what is important is that all of them make use of the judgments of highly qualified scientists. Exceptions to those well-established processes erode the confidence of the scientific community and the public alike."

High on the Charts

The institutions represented by the 4 petitioners have fared exceptionally well in obtaining federal funds for R&D, according to the latest tabulations of the National Science Foundation. The figures, for fiscal 1984, show that Stanford spent $174 million on R&D, of which $149 million came from federal agencies, making Stanford the fourth highest recipient of US government funds for research in universities.

Ninth and tenth, respectively, in the national rankings were UC San Diego ($140 million, of which $123 million came from Washington) and UC Berkeley ($133 million in R&D, with $87 million of it from US government research agencies).

UCLA ranked 11th, with $132 million for R&D, of which $96 million was provided by federal agencies. In the 18th and 19th positions, respectively, were UC San Francisco ($113 million for R&D, of which $82 million was federally financed, and UC Davis ($105 million, of which $45 million came from federal agencies.)

USC was 25th, with a total of $87 million in R&D; $64 million of it was provided by federal agencies.

Finally, Caltech held only the 55th position in the national standings for academic R&D standings, with $50 million in total spending, of which $43 million came from federal agencies. However, the Caltech total does not include the funding for the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which the institution operates under contract to NASA.

The letter from the 4 four Presidents concluded with the observation that "The root cause of the problem—the capital crisis affecting academic research institutions—should be addressed and remedied. In the meantime, however, we urge you and your colleagues to do all you can to support the existing merit review system and resist attempts to earmark funds for research proposals that have not received competitive, merit-based review."

Congress Eyeing Project Funds

Congressional forays in behalf of federal research funds for university constituents have focused on bricks and mortar and expensive scientific apparatus. Now there's growing concern among the government's research administrators that grants for the conduct of research may be gaining as an object of acquisitive Congressional interest.

Testifying last month before a House Appropriations Subcommittee chaired by Rep. Edward Boland (D-Mass.), John P. McTague, Acting Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, warned of Congressional attempts at tinkering with research funds that are now awarded competitively through peer review. McTague offered no examples and the subject wasn't pursued at the hearing. But he later indicated to SGR that the issue of Congressional intrusion into the process of research awards wasn't hypothetical.

An inquiry to officials at NSF and the Department of Energy brought the same response.

Boland has suggested that NSF impose "sanctions" against universities that lobby for earmarked appropriations. NSF and other agency chieftains are discreetly silent in public on revenge as a policy instrument. At a Washington social gathering last week, the head of one major agency for university-based research remarked that sanctions in retaliation for lobbying would cripple research at some institutions.

Nixon Returns to Bask in Credit for War on Cancer

The rehabilitation of Richard Nixon has staked out the War on Cancer as another good work which history must judge sympathetically in rendering judgment on the disgraced former President. If history complies, accuracy will require several qualifying footnotes.

Nixon did indeed support and sign the 1971 legislation that has rapidly poured billions into cancer research. A commemoration of that event induced him to make a rare visit to Washington on April 5 to be honored by the Association of Community Cancer Centers. But as with so much else in the turbulent and truncated Nixon presidency, the declaration of the War on Cancer arose from convoluted motives, and they weren't all pure or politically disinterested.

Hindsight shows that the War on Cancer was a case of doing the wrong thing for the wrong reason and, luckily, having it turn out well—a not-unknown succession of events in the American political context.

Cuts in the NCI Budget

Upon taking office in January 1969, Nixon and his budget planners sought to brake the budget growth of the National Institutes of Health and its largest component, the National Cancer Institute. In the first Nixon budget, NCI was slated to decline from $184 million to $180 million the next year. Though a token amount, the reduction was nonetheless a signal of the new Administration's attitude toward cancer research. When Congress balked and raised the NCI budget by $10 million, the White House withheld the money from NCI.

But by January 1971, Nixon's attitude toward cancer research had undergone a sudden turnabout. In his 1971 State of the Union address, he announced he would seek an additional $100 million for cancer research. Nearly a year later, at a crowded Christmas season ceremony in the White House, Nixon declared an all-out government campaign against cancer, signed the National Cancer Act of 1971 into law, and pledged that "nothing will be allowed to compromise that commitment."

This striking change did not originate in science or medicine. It came from politics.

Responding to the Nixon cuts and Vietnam-era slowdowns under Lyndon Johnson, the Mary Lasker lobbying operation had been whooping up cancer research as a sparkplug for resuming rapid budget growth for NIH. In 1969, full-page newspaper ads around the country proclaimed, "Mr. Nixon: You Can Cure Cancer." In 1970, the House and Senate passed nonsensical resolutions urging that cancer be cured by 1976 "as an appropriate commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the independence of our country."

The White House, bent on spending reductions, took all this in stride. What it couldn't ignore, however, was Senator Edward Kennedy. While politically recuperating from Chappaquiddick, Kennedy lucked into the chairmanship of a specially appointed Senate panel studying cancer research, and he spoke on cancer at his first post-Chappaquiddick public address.

With the 1972 election preying on the anxiety-ridden psyche of the Nixon White House, Kennedy couldn't be ruled out as a candidate. And there loomed the prospect of Kennedy as champion of cancer research and Nixon as scrooge. That was enough to inspire a turnabound in Nixon's views on government spending on cancer research and produce a declaration of the War on Cancer.

At the time, the NIH management and its allies in medical schools cautioned that cancer wasn't scientifically ripe for a vast infusion of money. Nonetheless it came, and the $1 billion-a-year mark for NCI was reached by the end of the decade.

In terms of more effective cancer treatments and preventive measures, payoff has been slow. As Nixon acknowledged in receiving an award at the recent Washington ceremony, "The bad news is that we had hoped we could find a cure for cancer, and we have not." The favorable news, he said, is that scientists are on the trail of the cause of cancer, "And if we find a cause, the cure is likely to come."

China, Detente Top Achievement

In 1971, Nixon predicted that the Cancer Act would come to be regarded as the most important achievement of his Administration. Today, in a more down-to-earth appraisal, he cited the opening to China and detente with the Soviets as his top achievements.

The sudden upsurge of money for cancer research initially came out of the hides of other parts of NIH. But, in recent years, the imbalances have been ironed out. The War on Cancer was oversold to a gullible public and excitable Congress. But by stampeding the Nixon White House into supporting the War on Cancer, the health lobbyists accomplished their goal of reopening the treasury for medical research.

Nixon deserves a share of the credit. After signing the Act into law, he actually took a personal interest in the cancer program. Frank Rauscher, whom he appointed to head NCI, says that Nixon used to call him to the White House fairly often for a personal report on the newly expanded program. None of Nixon's successors has ever shown that interest.

History owes Nixon a nod for cancer research—but with an asterisk or two.—DSG

White House Science Office: Appointment in Limbo

Washington science-policy circles continue to wonder what the White House intends for the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), where John P. McTague has been serving as Acting Director since George A. Keyworth II quit for private business on January 1.

Some half-dozen names, including McTague's, have been mentioned off and on since Keyworth gave notice 5 weeks before his departure. But the appointment process—if there is one in progress—remains out of view. Among the reservations raised by prospective candidates are that the ebullient Keyworth would be a hard act to follow; the job calls for cheerleading the Strategic Defense Initiative, rather than dispassionately advising on it, and that the Gramm-Rudman era provides little opportunity for the presidential Science Adviser to perform the only service valued by the scientific community—delivery of bigger budgets.

One often-mentioned prospect, Roland Schmitt, GE Senior Vice President for Corporate Technology, tells SGR that he's in mid-stream with major undertakings at GE and that he's not in the running for the White House post. In a Q&A in the preceding issue of SGR, McTague diplomatically said, "I'm not campaigning for any office." Another mentioned-name says that he was asked, but declined because of doubts that the present White House staff management considers the post important. To eliminate any doubt, he says, he suggested that the job be elevated to cabinet status and that the President himself extend the offer. Neither has happened.

While Washington's many aficiondos of presidential science advice mutter about the bureaucratic handicap of having "Acting" appended to the title of Director, OSTP's day-to-day operations do not appear to be affected. Senior agency officials showed up at last month's meeting of the White House Science Council to provide briefings on major science and technology issues, including AIDS, the Strategic Defense Initiative, and the aerospace-plane project that the President announced in his last State of the Union address.

McTague has recently been on the international circuit, traveling to Denmark to discuss SDI with science and engineering organizations and to a science and technology conference that New York University held in Italy. He's scheduled to attend a conference on science and technology that the Association of South East Asian Nations is holding April 24-31 in Kuala Lumpur.

In the interview with SGR, McTague discounted the effects of the 40 percent budget cut that the White House is planning for OSTP in the next fiscal year. He said that the office can keep up its staff level by taking on detailees from other agencies—for which, under the rules governing such things, OSTP need pay only half the costs.

That may be his intention, but officials at the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy—which have frequently been raided for such recruits—say that with Gramm-Rudman pressing on their staff levels, they're not disposed to subsidize staffing at another agency.

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